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ALICE VILLARUZ LACSON  
and granddaughter  
PIA LLANES

Philippines  
USA  
Australia  
Canada  
Hongkong  
New Zealand  
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# MOMMY ALICE

Long before it became fashionable for the rich (and famous) of Iloilo to travel to any corner of the world, Alice Villaruz Lacson — with a coterie of family members — toured the four corners in style as early as 1950. Travelling was one of her most treasured passions, and a welcome respite from long months of hard work as a businesswoman.

The Lacsons of Molo were into the construction, furniture-making, agriculture and transportation businesses operating in Iloilo, Roxas City, and Antique. Managing them were Eusebio "Dodoy Sebio" Lacson (now deceased) and his wife Alice, or Mommy Alice. It was she, as an invaluable helpmate, who literally steered the family's construction line into a gold mine. She did the most taxing jobs like interfacing with government officials and clients, attending biddings, transacting and closing deals, delivering goods, etc. At the age of 20 when most young women thought of a bountiful social life, Mommy Alice was neck deep in work. Her responsibilities further deepened upon the early death of her husband of cancer in 1970.

Mommy Alice remembers how stiff competition among contractors was then. Among her strong Ilonggo rivals for government contracts were the Benid Lumber (the strongest, she adds), Denila Lumber, Juan Tong, Go Pun, Oriental, St. Joseph, and not to exclude those coming from outside Iloilo. In all, some 300 bidders would flock to the Provincial Capitol to outbid each other. Beside them, Mommy Alice stood out physically as the only female bidder.

"Bidding sa Iloilo (then) was only done once a year. If you lose, the whole year you have no project (with the government)." Projects, but naturally, meant the construction of bridges, roads, buildings, schoolhouses — big infrastructures that never failed to make many contractors wealthy several times over. Sometime in 1950, Mommy Alice finally (and successfully despite initial machinations to sidestep



Photo above: Young couple Eusebio and Alice Lacson.  
Photo below: Eusebio Lacson's family: (L-R) Edw. Elizabeth, Eusebio and Alice, Arlene, and Arlene.  
Photo was taken at the Sheraton-Philippines Hotel.







Philippine First Lady Imelda Marcos visited Tibiao, Antique Mayor Eusebio Lacson at the St. Paul Hospital after he underwent a gall bladder operation. From left: Alice, Vice-President Fernando Lopez and University of San Agustin Rector Fr. Lana.

her) outbided her competitors. Then on, every much-sought after government contract went to the Lacson construction firm.

"For almost 15 years, controlled *ko ang* the whole province of Iloilo. *Kay joven ako, ako ang ginasugo (ni Dodoy Sebio) nga mag-transact sa gobyerno. Ako ang naga-deal, follow-up, deliver. May concession lumber ang akon Lolo kag Papa sa Sibuyan Island kag Mindoro. Nagaprodukto kag naga-cut kami sang lumber parehas sang yakal, molave, tiga. Amo ina nga waay gid ako kulba nga makulangan sang lumber. In every kilometer nga may bodega ang district engineer, may ready stock ako dira. Of course the bidding procedures later changed. Pero nag-untat lang kami magnegosyo sa gobyerno sang 1992."*

Their four children were involved hands-on in various facets of the family business. Eldest son Arnold (Dong), a product of MAPUA, took charge of public relations and clientele development affairs; Edward (also of MAPUA) and Elizabeth (Beth), an Assumption College alumna, faced field operations and troubleshooting jobs for their mother; while youngest daughter Arlene (of Stella Maris College in Quezon City and the San Juan de Letran College where she finished her MBA degree), meanwhile, attended to all the paper and financial requirements of the business. Mommy Alice, like a CEO, mobilized her children as she saw befitting their respective character and personality.

Arlene remembers how busy everyone was. Their huge Molo house *cum* office vibrated with a beehive of business activities at daytime. At night, it became a place of entertaining countless business clients, associates and friends. Having them around nightly became a part of everyday living with the Lacsons. Mommy Alice, meanwhile, fed everyone with good food and drinks straight from her well-stocked storerooms and kitchen.

Then early at dawn, she would hie off to a certain town to catch a certain district engineer (or government official) in his house to have some papers signed before he leaves for office. Oftentimes, she would have to wait patiently in her

car because the engineer (or public officer) and his family have not waken up. Such a discomfort hardly mattered to her.

MISSION accomplished, she'd speed back to the city for an early morning mass, then prepare the breakfast of her kids.

As a young girl, Mommy Alice already was a workaholic. From Roxas City (hometown of the Villaruzes), her family evacuated to Romblon (birthplace of her mother) during the outbreak of the second world war. In fact, many families in Roxas took the same course.

The Villaruzes lived near a military camp and it was there where Mommy Alice tested her business acumen. It was her custom then to visit the camp frequently with cousins and friends in tow, selling whatever items that would wriggle money out of the pockets of the



Eusebio and Alice visit Hawaii with Elizabeth, Clarence and Helen Gillia, Arnold and a family doctor.





In London with Lloyd Marcos.



In Rome with then Fr. Alberto Piamonte as guide.

San Jose to Libertad. In 1967, elected Tibiao mayor.

"He won by a landslide. So mayor, for the first time in the hi Antique, the provincial (sport) was held in Tibiao. During his was also the cleanest town in Antique." He later received a r award as one of the most outsi town mayors.

Mommy Alice, Tibiao's first la her hands full running the Iloilo businesses. But as a supportiv she helped her husband and the of Tibiao in a special way. "*Ko kuarta ang munisipyo, akon kuai ginahatag ko. Kon magpa-Mani, ako ang naga-follow-up sang transaksyon nila.*"

The Lacsons worked wi restraints and enjoyed themsel the least limits. Mommy Alice a husband always travelled a together. At other times, with children. "*First time nga naglaka* was in 1950 sa Hongkong, Taipei Bangkok. But every December, w abroad. *Umpisa kami sa Asia ang* we go to Europe. *Tag-seven m* kami sa abroad kag personal and p ang travel namon. *Waay kami i* upod sa turista or sa travel tours. 1967 lang kami nga may upod, si Marcos kag Doctor Pacifico Mar

"Sa abroad, ang husband ko mahilig mag-shopping. *Minalat* bayo kag bag ang dala niya. *At* indi mahilig mag-shopping. Ang gusto maglagaw lang kag mag- although I bought plenty of Mu pieces in Italy. Educational ang pur sang akon travel. *Indi ko makuh* libro o pag-eskwela ang natun-an akon travel kay actual ang nakita

For this reason, Mommy Alice l to travel in style, living in expen hotels, eating in the best restaurants, trying what's new in the season. experiences added more insights to

military top brass. What she earned she saved to indulge herself with. It was in this camp that she first met Eusebio, an army lieutenant many year her senior.

At the tender age of 15, she married him, joining 17 other young couples (including the daughter of the Roxas City mayor then) in a mass wedding. Come liberation time, she and her husband re-settled in Roxas City where their lumber and furniture businesses grew and flourished. In 1954, the couple transferred to Iloilo where they permanently settled. Here, too, the Lacsons and their children earned their places in Iloilo's social set.

The Lacsons carved their names in business and politics in Antique as well. Eusebio, whose maternal roots are traceable in the town of Tibiao, owned large tracts of agricultural land and run a most profitable transportation business (the first in Antique) from the capital town of

store of knowledge, she says. "*Nag-untat ang (yearly) tour na pagmasakit niya (Dodoy Eusebio) in 1970.*" He died w undergoing extensive treatment in the United States. Sometim the 80s, Mommy Alice was back to her travelling form.

One time she relates, she and her husband were in Rome. Ilonggo priest-friend on study leave there booked them in a pens house run by an Italian woman working in the Philippine consi office. Since most of her lodgers were Filipino dignitaries on offi business that part of the globe, her meals were predominar consisting of Filipino food. Mommy Alice frowned at the idea. was the same cuisine that dominated her dining table in Iloilo. *! said, "Manol kita nga naghaling sa Pilipinas, manol man gihap kung diri."* Without any second thought, she billeted herself i five-star hotel, her husband trailing not far behind.



Her own children take after her. "We love to travel and we want to explore the good restaurants which we want to recommend to friends," Arlene says. Like her elder sister Beth, she also brings along her own children when abroad. It is a Lacson trait to live the best way possible and to share with others.

Countless people (most of them anonymous now to Mommy Alice) have taken part of her largesse over the years. She is known to have shelled out, on many instances, her personal money to support the education (sometimes including board, lodging and allowance) of children of poor parents. Some of her "scholars" are now doctors, lawyers, nurses, teachers and engineers. Churches and religious groups are also her beneficiaries. But she is quick to point out that she's always given anonymously.

For this reason, and largely too as a successful businesswoman, she received numerous awards and recognition from prestigious organizations. She cannot recall most of them because to her they seem not to be that important. If she has her way, she'd rather work silently without expecting recognition in return.

"She was mother and father of the family," Arlene says. "Until now, *styapa rin ang 'brains' namon*. All the cousins in her mother side *ginbuligan ni Mommy*. *Mga hinablos ni Daddy* she helped quietly. Even now *sa mga apo niya*, she silently gives all of them so no one will feel bad."

Her working pace has definitely slowed down. She was confined in her house for almost two months due to an ailment. When her family doctor recently proclaimed her "healthy as a teenager," she was so ecstatic she vowed to keep it easy in her activities. Four organizations can break her self-imposed rest: the CWL, Soroptimist Club, Garden Club of Iloilo and the Iloilo Chamber of Commerce, all of which she is a member in.

Now you ask, is she retiring from travelling abroad? Far from it. Late last year, she made four trips: Canada, South Korea, Taiwan, and Hongkong with her children and grandchildren. No doubt, when the travel itch hits her again, off she'll go to see the best things the world can offer.



Alice with her daughters, some grandchildren and friends in South Korea which include Beth and Arlene, Mark Lacson Evangelista, Kenneth Lacson Agustin, Atty. Ricky Castro, Ted Castro, Bess Mabilog and Noel Guillergan.



Cover Photo by  
Ronny Poblacion

Receiving the Dr. Jose Rizal Humanitarian Award in 1988 from Manoling Morato at the Camelot Hotel in Quezon City.



# Call Her Pia

**P**icture a pretty and fair-skinned girl (deliciously healthy-looking, too!) doing her basic skating routines at the SM Megamall. Suddenly she slips, giggles at herself, gets up and moves on.

"*Pagnadulas ka okay lang*," she reminds herself silently, unmindful of the people who've seen her. Presumably some girlfriends, the goodlooking La Salle and IS (International School) guys who skate with her, the UP machos, and the unnamed kibitzers who always take a peek of the skating rink from shopping.

A *fancix* par like this doesn't faze her a bit when focused on skating. Her regular two-hour practice on the rink is the other half of her young life (her studies being the first half) and the all-important affair of the moment. After all, the young girl is seriously considering turning herself into a skilled hockey player who may one day participate in



Seven-year-old Pia (center) as little Maria of the *West Side Story*, a Broadway production of O.B. Montessori-Greenhills, presented at the Rizal Theater in Makati in 1986.

tournaments.

Meet Pia, short for such a long name like Purita Alicia Lacson Leviste Llanes of Iloilo and Batangas. A freshman Fine Arts student at the Holy Spirit College in Manila, she is the 18-year-old only daughter of Arlene Lacson of Iloilo City.

Pia is a typical teenager who's into a lot of things that seem important all together. She's a busybody. Well, she's always been. She can't recall a day when she was without anything to do. In fact, she'd been a busy kid since she was in elementary grades at the O.B. Montessori in Greenhills, joining each and every event in school. "I was super-active," she declares.

In high school still at the O.B. Montessori, she became a member of a five-man band, playing for free in her school, at the Aquinas High School, the Holy Spirit College, just to name a few. Pia played the keyboards and the guitar. "I was an instrumentalist with the DV-8, too. Fourth year *kami* when the band stopped playing together." The parting was really coming since the band members would be going to different colleges and universities.

Now a young lady at 18, Pia is seriously thinking about her life and what the future holds. "*Matured na ako*. When I turned 18, I promised to do anything I want. *Doing my own thing concerns me a lot*." I want to do more challenging things. I want to be different. *Ayoko kasing mangyari sa akin na kaya naging ganyan ako dahil yung Mom ko is ganyan or my Dad is ganyan. Parang wala akong identity if any of that happens. Kaya I try to do anything until I can pinpoint where I*



Top photo: *Broadway Express*, a showcase of Broadway shows presented at the Maria Montessori Hall O.B. Montessori last March 15, 1996; Pia (right, standing) was part of the *Jesus Christ Superstar* cast directed by G. Aldeguer. Photo below: As a small clown in a ballet she called *Classic* presented by the Halili-Cruz School of Dance at the Meralco Theater.





Photo by

Paulo P. P.





A month after touring Korea, Pia visits Taipeh with grandma Alice Lacson, mom Arlene, and brother Kenneth. Pia has also journeyed to Canada and Japan.

want to excell in. Like hockey. I want to finish something *kahit na sa* second level (of the hockey program) *lang* I'll be happy because *naghirap ako*. Para sa akin, *wala pa akong nau-achieve* yet but I want to be recognized for what I am."

Anyone who wants to know Pia better should be aware that she's a voracious reader. "I read *yung pang-fantasy-pang-adventure* types of books. *Mga science fiction*. Horror books appeal to me, too.

"Actually I'm a latebloomer in reading. I read Mills and Boons books in high school until I realized what a fool I was reading such books whose plots were always the same and predictable. When I decided to stop reading them, *binenta ko ang mga Mills and Boons ko*. Horror books are more exciting to read. There's something new happening in every story. The plot is realistic at *hindi predictable*."

The young lady is a collector of sorts as well. Like a squirrel, she collects and hoards stuffs. Some are kid stuffs, she admits, like superhero comics and cards that keep her in touch with the child in her. "That's why I blend well with kids. I know what they like and what interests them. Even as I grow older, I want to have a childlike trait *na natitira sa akin*. It makes life more fun."

Her room is a sanctuary of other collectibles gathered through the years here and abroad: stationeries, her own drawings and paintings, paperdolls and books. Her old stamp collection has been bequeathed to her only brother Kenneth, a seven-year-old student at the Kostka School. "*Yung stickers pinamigay ko na rin*," Pia says.

While her Mom could give her whatever signature brand clothes and other wearables her eyes set on (and her dad Francis Leviste Llanes whom she visits yearly in the United States), Pia's choice of clothes is down-to-earth and practical. "*Hindi ako choosy*. I'll wear anything I can get from the cabinet. I hate formal clothes. I feel like I'm dressing up for somebody else. *Parang it's not me*. I dress up for myself because I don't want to give people the impression *na ganito ako* when actually I'm not."

She expects the same brand of honesty and frankness from her friends. "*Ayokang tuong paxikot-sikot and usapan*. *Gusto ko prangkahan*. *Ako'y isang taong mahirap makasama kung puro kuartehan ang ipakita mo sa akin*. Frank and honest *lang ako* basta walang *masasaktan*."

Karen Jovellana, her classmate since O.B. Montessori years, is her best friend and soulmate. They can both read each other's moods and minds. A student at the Philippine Rehabilitation Institute, Karen comes



Jamming with best friend Karen Jovellana at the Bayview Hotel in Roxas Boulevard.

on as a conscientizer. She patiently listens to her pal's woes a jolts her back to earth and into re-thinking about her options whenever Pia tends to over-emote. Pia plays the same role to her. Though now separated in college, they remain inseparables during their spare hours.

Any boyfriends? "Secret!" Pia squeals excitedly. On a sober note she denies having one and explains why. "*Nai-i-intimidate ang mga guys who call me up*. *Gusto ko kasi yung person na mas higit pa sa magagawa niya kaysa sa akin*. Also, I don't like guys who *smol*. *Gusto ko yung silent at cool ang dating pero may laman ang utak*. The guy is interested in me, *gusto ko yung guy mismo ang maghuhang paraan to get closer to me*. If he likes me, he'll find a way."

But of course, Charlie, marriage is the farthest from her mind. She sees herself as a bride walking the aisle when she reaches 30. "*Gusto ko if I have lots of money and a stable career then I will marry*. But like where I am now, I can do anything and I make the most of what there for me."

Being an only daughter has not turned her into a modern-day *señorita*. Pia has been trained by mom Arlene to face the realities of life. She speaks highly of her daughter as a prudent spender and saver whose money goes straight to the bank. Basically a homebody, Pia knows how to do the housechores—*notwithstanding* the number of housemaids around—and even does the marketing herself.

"Give her five hundred pesos for marketing she'll only spend two hundred," says Arlene. "Yet her marketing items are complete."

In all, Pia still thinks of herself as an ordinary girl. Nothing special. Just a teener cruising through life, not yet clear about where to find her niche under the sun. To quote her: "I'm a regular, ordinary person like anyone else walking down the road and wondering what to do next." That's Pia—she's cool.

With dad Francis Leviste Llanes and grandpa Atty. Gaudencio Martinez Llanes in New Jersey.







Michelle Landings, Brandy Lacson, Pia and escort cousin Mark Evangelista, and Suzette Yusay.



Raul dela Cruz, Pia, Lourdes Mercado, and Bliss Galang.



O.B. Montessori president Preciosa Soliven gives her impression about the honoree.

## BECAUSE THE BABY IS NOW A LADY

It was one evening worth remembering and a moment to cherish for **Purita Alicia "Pia" Lacson Llanes** when her mom hosted a dinner-dance party in her honor at the Bayview Ballroom of the Bayview Park Hotel in Roxas Boulevard, Manila last September 29.

Mom **Arlene Lacson** didn't leave anything to chance to make sure her only daughter's debut party would turn out as grand and befitting a pretty young lady.

Over 100 plus well-chosen guests attended the buffet dinner affair, some of whom jetted in from Iloilo City like couturier **Poli Abastillas** who made the three fabulous gowns of Pia, including the dresses of the 17 cotillioners. Iloilo-based **Mark Evangelista**, Pia's cousin, brought all his band members and instruments to the delight of the young guests who squealed at every twang of the guitar.



Leilani Pasueña lights a candle on Pia's cake.



Stephanie Co and Jay Carlos Lopez.



Jennifer Lim and Erwin Cabrera.



Veronica Viernes and Glenn Hernandez.





Carmenez Cruz and Ian John Evangelista.



Julibel Bungo and Raimor Escueta.



Natalie Davao and Reginald Perez.



Bianca Escueta and Karem Mangondaya.



Roxanne Parras and Jericho Taberna.



Crystalyn Romero and Harley Herrera.



Evecar Cruz and Mark Taberna.



Ruby May Certeza and Paul John Chua.



Dimple Mangondaya and Paolo Alcedo.





*Standing:* Paolo Evangelista, Paul Evangelista, mom Arlene, Pia and stepdad Rollie. *Seated:* Cecil Fornier, Engr. Francisco Toledo, Elizabeth Toledo, Chingky Asuncion, Belma and July Bungo.



Bianca Escueta, Rollie, Pia, Arlene, and Carmen "Baby" Sales.



Pia with parents Arlene and Rollie, and her OB Montessori chums (from left) Christ Law, Rashida Ramos, Catherine Mangahas, Gemma Dee, Jennifer Dee, Karen Tiongson, Aubrey Grajo, Steve Sarabia, and Jasper Beron.



Arlene, Pia and Rollie with couple Al and Cathy Jovellana.



Edgar Epilepsia, Edgar Bendigoza, Kenneth Agustin, Dr. Bong Setias, Joel Garcia, Poli Abastillas, Lally and Atty. Ricky Castro.



Together with Bobot and Remy Fernando, Fiscal Leah Armamento, and Atty. Boy Armamento.



*Standing:* Beth Lacson, Atty. Andresito Fornier, Gen. Jovencio Sales, Rolie, Pia, Arlene. *Seated:* Lambunao Mayor Bugok Ramirez, Edward Lacson, and Col. Nilo dela Cruz.



Chary Lambatin, Lilia Yusay-Gonzales, Aida Castigador-Yusay, and Suzette Yusay.